



Check Your Hot Spots!

A Factsheet on Rural Fire Safety and Prevention

Each year fire claims the lives of 4,500 Americans, injures tens of thousands, and causes billions of dollars worth of damage. People living in rural areas are more than twice as likely to die in a fire than those living in mid-sized cities or suburban areas. The misuse of wood stoves, portable space heaters, kerosene heaters and central heating units are especially common risks in rural areas and cause about 300 deaths a year. These heating sources are one of the most rapidly increasing causes of fire in the United States.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) believes rural fire problems can be reduced by teaching people to recognize the hazards. By following some of the outlined precautionary steps, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a fire casualty.

WOOD STOVES

Wood stoves cause over 6,500 residential fires every year. Carefully follow the manufacturer's installation and maintenance instructions. Look for solid construction, such as plate steel or cast iron metal. Check for cracks and inspect legs, hinges, and door seals for smooth joints and seams. Use only seasoned wood for fuel, not green wood, artificial logs, or trash. Inspect and clean your pipes and chimneys annually and check monthly for damage or obstructions. Be sure to keep combustible objects at least three feet away from your wood stove.

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS

Buy only heaters with the UL safety listing. Check to make sure it has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over. Heaters are not dryers or tables; don't dry clothes or store objects on top of your heater. Space heaters need space; keep combustibles at least three feet away from each heater. Always unplug your electric space heater when not in use.

KEROSENE HEATERS

Buy only UL approved heaters and check with your local fire department on the legality of kerosene heater use in your community. Never fill your heater with gasoline or camp stove fuel; both flair-up easily. Only use crystal clear, K-1 kerosene. Never overfill any portable heater. Use the kerosene heater in a well ventilated room.



FIREPLACES

Fireplaces regularly build up creosote in their chimneys. They need to be cleaned out frequently and chimneys should be inspected for obstructions and cracks to prevent deadly chimney and roof fires. Check to make sure the damper is open before starting any fire. Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in your fireplace--these materials cause heavy creosote build-up and are difficult to control. Use a screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks. Don't wear loose-fitting clothes near any open flame. Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed. Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container outside the home.

Finally, having a working smoke detector dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

For More Information Contact:
The United States Fire Administration
Office of Fire Management Programs
16825 South Seton Avenue
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Or visit the USFA website:
www.usfa.fema.gov